

BolivianExpress

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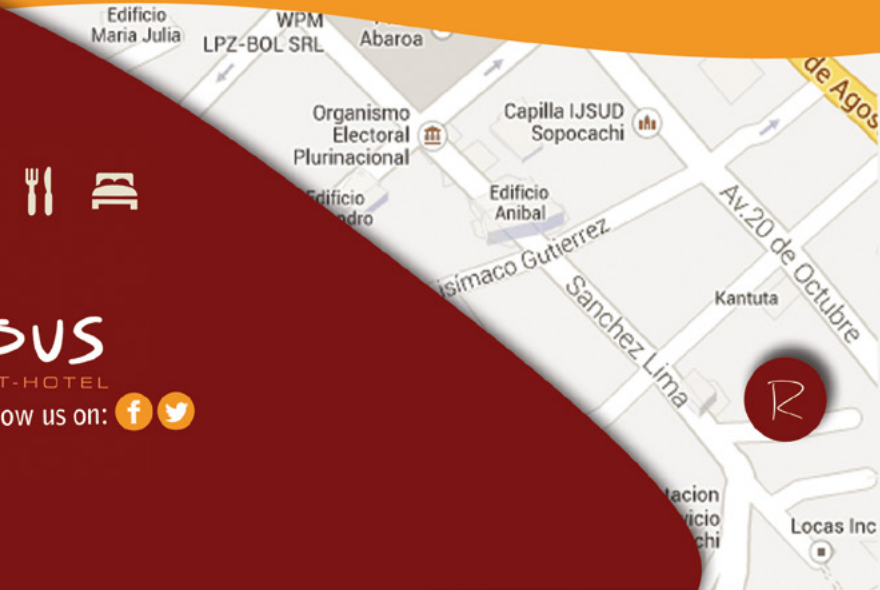
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For why is gambling a whit worse than any other method of acquiring money? How, for instance, is it worse than trade?

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Gambler*

Games seem just as popular on the playground as they do in the prison courtyard. Why is this so? 'It's about making use of time which to them feels eternal' says Colonel José Peña, San Pedro Prison's maximum authority. Luis, one of the inmates we spoke to for this issue also appreciates the importance of games in his day-to-day life: 'Because our time is often spent in boredom, it's important to keep people busy and relieve the tension. People can get stressed and even violent if they have no way having fun and letting it all out'.

We're told doing sport gives us endorphins, that taking risks gives us adrenaline. One doesn't need to be a chemist or a molecular biologist to understand how much happiness and excitement games can bring about. But it's not just about joy; games are also cathartic and allow us to deal with anger and suffering. And of course, the passions generated by games such as football are often catalysts to displays of violence between fans. Whatever emotions they generate, games tap into the core of our humanities, turning us at once into brutes and aesthetes.

Today, games are hardly the province of children, if they ever were. In an age where all phones and computer screens seduce and plead to be interacted with through touch, it's precisely children who are forgetting what playing is all about (in a traditional sense). We explored the city's parks in the quest to find typical bolivian games, lost in time or merely forgotten. To our surprise, it was these very games—many of them homemade—that were able to bridge generations, connecting the youngest members of our society with the oldest. In the age of Angry Birds, a small girl can still fall prey to the allure of learning how to make her own kite with her grandfather.

But we also discovered that the semantics of gaming (along with coextensional words such as playing) in Bolivia are stretched to include activities such as rotating credit associations. Bolivians, many of them middle-aged women, talk of playing the game of pasanaku, in which they take turns collecting the proceeds from a community chest made up of individual contributions. This may seem surprising to those used to associating these activities with financial institutions which are un-fun almost as a rule (no-one really chooses their bank based on how fun it is). But the idea certainly has its logic. Like other games, these groups involve friends abiding by a set of rules, and doing so not just for the prize, but to spend time and share with one another. ✕

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary.

By Amaru Villanueva Rance

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A PASSION SHARED BY YOUNG AND OLD

ANTAÑO

CHRISTINA GRÜNEWALD ROAMS THE STREETS OF LA PAZ
AND EL ALTO IN A QUEST TO DISCOVER SOME OF THE
CITY'S MOST TRADITIONAL GAMES

THUNKUÑA

Thursday, 9.30 am. Destination: El Alto.

The drive up the hillsides feels like leaving one world for another. Two minibuses and a few pictures later, we arrive at the altiplano. Past paved streets peppered with market vendors we end up at a dusty square. We ask the only person around for the way to the nearest school and then knock on its metal door.

We ask the teachers about traditional games played in Bolivia, and 'thunkuña' is the first one that comes to mind—a game known in English as 'Hopscotch', 'Hüpfekästchen' in German and 'Stapu' in Hindi.

In order to play it, you need chalk and a stone for each of the players. Firstly, you must draw an '**avioncito**' (meaning 'little plane') on the ground which will serve as the arena. To start the game, you throw a stone into square number 1—something not everyone can accomplish in their first try, especially when a group of 'turistas' is watching.

Once you succeed, you jump on one foot from square to square, using both feet only on the 'wings' of the little plane. After you arrive at the end of the chalk drawing, you turn around and hop the way back towards your stone, which you must pick up while still standing on only one foot. The hats children wear in Bolivia add a level of difficulty to the game, as they must be held in place while jumping from one square to another.



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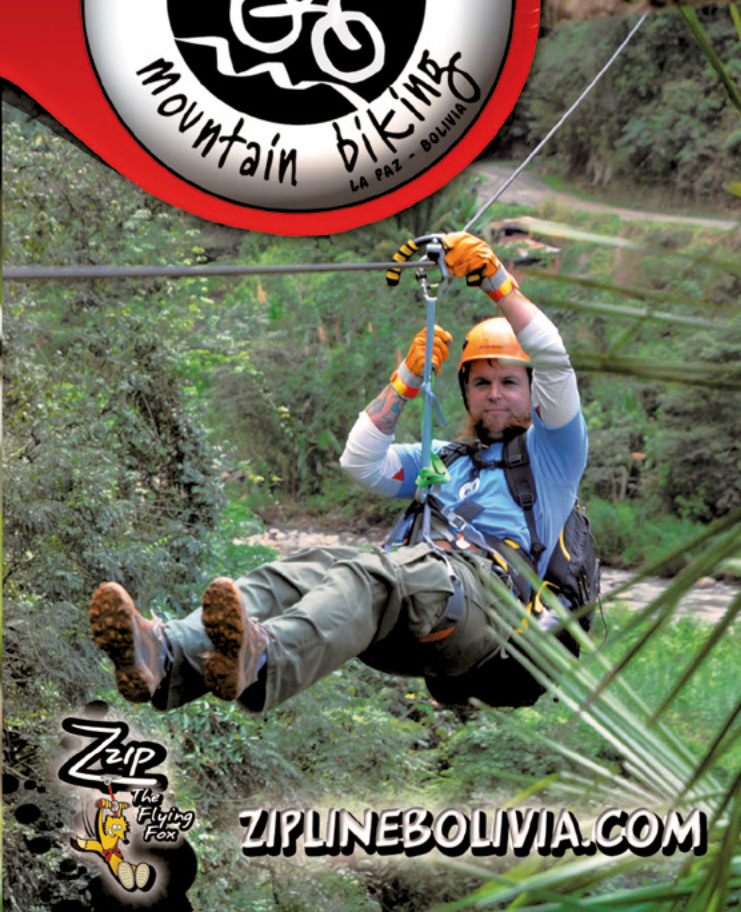


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PATA PATA

One, two, three aaaand: hop, hop, hop, hop, trip - 'you're out'!



Rope skipping—a game that never goes missing in playgrounds and backyards from every corner of the planet. There's plenty of variety when it comes to playing styles: you can skip on your own, holding both ends of the rope, or in a group in which two participants swing the rope for the rest. In the late 80s and early 90s, a related game became a momentary craze in Bolivia. Like skipping, it involves a rope which brushes under your feet while you jump, but this variant is so different it is best seen as a distant cousin of the traditional game.

We are still at Pipiripi, a place with great energy and happy faces all around. The employees walk around handing toys to those willing to try them. They explain how to use them and even how to make them yourself. One woman shows us Pata Pata.

All you need is an empty plastic bottle and a piece of rope. Tie one end of the rope to your ankle, and the other to a plastic bottle. Hold the plastic bottle in your hand and throw it away from your body towards the ground. Quickly move your foot attached to the rope so that the bottle spins in a circular motion around you, forcing you to hop over the rope. Foot-eye-coordination is key, but practice makes perfect.

CHAMAN

In La Paz we find a game for young and old, a game of stones which involves 5 **piedritas** or pebbles.

I am on a guided tour through the markets of La Paz, still on the hunt for traditional games. The tour is very private. There are two of us along with a guide. Upon telling her about our mission she promises to show us her favorite game. After a bit of walking, a cinnamon ice cream and some honey-roasted peanuts, we sit down at the square in front of San Pedro Prison. The name of game, she tells us, is 'Chamán'.

To play it, you count up to 30 and back to 1. Each number denotes a different way to pick up and throw the 5 stones, meaning that to play it was first necessary to memorise all the different permutations. My first impression was that this game required one to be nimble and dexterous. It's very fast and all you see is a hand moving quickly, catching and letting go of the stones. Plenty of practice is required, and with time comes greater agility, allowing you to play the game faster every time. The game can be played by up to 30 people, either just for fun or in a competition with prizes. It can last for hours, but you can adapt the rules to your preference.

The first player to complete the moves of counting up to 30 and back to one, wins. Speed is therefore the key.






Rueda

As I sit by the sandpit, watching colourful kites cut through the sky, I can hear kids playing, parents calling, and a steady rumbling of metallic wheels being pushed along with the help of an especially-shaped wire. The sound is reminiscent of a musical triangle, but this is no musical instrument, it is one of Bolivia's most traditional games—the 'Rueda' or 'Aro'.

The player holds a metallic stick in his hands, which he uses to push the metallic wheel to get it rolling, and later to guide it. It can be played by a single player, or can be used to race others, adding a level of complexity to the game as wheels and sticks crash and tangle to the sound of clashing metal.

It is played by children, though occasionally you'll find older men playing it as well; their long years of training have helped them master the game. They can run multiple rounds along the wooden planks that surround the sandpit while their kids, thrilled and inexperienced, only manage to take a few steps. I watch one such man who has mastered the rueda, his name is Froilán Gamarra. He tells BX how, as a boy, he had to walk 2km to school. He used the rueda as a source of distraction in his commute. "Playing this game I would also get to school much faster", he adds, later explaining that this led to him competing with other boys his age who no doubt did the same. Now Froilán is a happy parent and his son, it turns out, is also an expert at Aro.


T'EJETA



Like in any growing city, traditional games in La Paz are quietly disappearing from street corners and local parks. Luckily, though, in El Parque Urbano Central we can find 'Pipiripi', a recreational and interactive centre for children, which focuses on getting them away from computers and television through the preservation of the local game culture and traditions.

This intercultural and intergenerational place provides a range of traditional toys for visitors. It also hosts events such as kite competitions, one of which I attended on the day of my visit. The place was busy and buzzing, with contestants and passerby occasionally getting tangled up in their colourful kites.

One of the sections that attracts a lot of attention is the square people use to play T'ejeta. Two small goals, a homemade ball and an indefinite number of players are needed to play. Mainly boys take part, dressed in their casual day wear or professional-looking football shirts. Sometimes mums are allowed to sub-in as substitute goalies.



Compared to football, everything is smaller. Not even the field is needed; streets work just as well. The ball itself—giving the game its name—is made out of socks, old cloths and grains, making it cheap and easily replaceable using recycled materials. It is not a ball you can buy; the entire spirit is defined by it being homemade. The only apparent downside is that it gets heavy and soggy in the rain, splashing water everywhere as it flies. Additionally, it appears to bounce a lot more than a football and is visibly softer. Technique is everything when it comes to the t'ejeta: both in the making of this traditional ball, and in its use at heart of the most popular sport on this planet.

RAYUELA

TEXT : AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE



'Rayuela' usually means hopscotch, but in the valleys of Cochabamba it is the name given to an altogether different game, typically played by adults. It involves a small metallic board which is placed against the wall. Players throw small coins, aiming to get them into the hole (2 points). When the coin lands at the front of the tray a single point is awarded. Before playing you must decide how many points must be earned before a winner is declared. It's all very relaxed: a pastime more than a game, or simply a way to spend lazy afternoons in the shade.



TEPE

TEXT : AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

Deep in the the sub-highland region of the Chaco, is dreamy and sweltering Monteagudo, where a traditional pastime is enjoyed by young and old. Central to this game is a curious artefact made from animal bone (typically from the knee of an ox), along with two iron plates affixed to either side, using screws and arcane ironwork. One would be forgiven for mistaking the 'tepe' as a prehispanic archaeological relic.

In order to play a small mud pen must be found (or created). The tepe is carefully thrown, and a point is awarded if it lands the right way up. A point is deducted when it lands upside down. Two points are given to the improbable feat of landing the tepe on its side—though I'm assured it does happen. To outsiders it might seem a game down to chance, like tossing a coin or rolling dice. As soon as I suggest this to my host he shakes his finger and laughs 'No no—es de saber'. To play this game well, you have to 'know'. What, it is not clear. ✕





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BOLIVIA MAR

ALEXANDER CONESA-PIETSCHECK WALKS INTO ONE
OF BOLIVIA'S MOST ESTABLISHED TOY SHOPS TO
DISCOVER THAT EDUCATION AND FUN COME HAND IN
HAND FOR ALL CHILDREN, YOUNG AND OLD.

usual toys, but because they have a different approach to toy making, and the 'toy experience'. Welcome to Boliviamar.

The history of this shop dates back 1992, when they first opened their doors to the general public. Owned by a Peruvian family, Boliviamar's mission has always been to make good quality toys that are affordable, with most prices ranging from 5-30 bolivianos. As well as providing entertainment, it is their aim to also encourage kids to learn while doing so.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Mr. René Laguna, the commercial manager of Boliviamar. He pointed out how many psychologists, doctors and pediatricians buy their toys 'because they help in the education of the kids, and they strengthen the learning experience by making it educational and fun at the same time'.

Most of the toys in Boliviamar are made out of wood or '**goma eva**'. There are several sections dedicated to education, where parents can find different games that teach the children the alphabet while ordering them in shapes and colours. It is even possible to buy a wooden toy, that when put together teaches the child the order of the numbers, creating a very oddly shaped fish in the process.

Although Boliviamar's main goal is to provide educational toys, we must not forget that it is a toy store, after all. You can find toys that are familiar to many people around the world, such as pick-up sticks, Monopoly, battleship, 'pata pata', and the 'diabolo'.

It is refreshing to walk into a toy store that doesn't offer toys available everywhere else. As a place to find toys that are at once educational and affordable, it's important to support these initiatives in a country where fun and education for young children can be in short provision from other sources. And as a way of doing my part, I made sure I bought some souvenirs before I left. Some will be given as gifts, whereas others will find a proud place among my current collection. ✕

What makes a toy great? Is it the quality, or is it the kids' reactions have when they open one from the freshly-sealed box?

Walking around downtown La Paz can be somewhat of an adventure. The never-ending streets merge with unexpected alleyways, disconcerting those who, like me, don't know the area well.

and their dream houses are also in abundance, though their choice is largely restricted to the prices that distinguish them.

As a 21-year-old, people could be mistaken for thinking that my interest in toys has vanished over the years. Yet this is far from being the case. Toys have always played a big part of my life, even up to this day. Last Christmas I received three Lego sets from my grandmother. The gifts could not have been more appropriate given my tastes, I

YOU CAN FIND TOYS THAT ARE FAMILIAR TO MANY PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD, SUCH AS PICK-UP STICKS, MONOPOLY, BATTLESHIP, 'PATA PATA', AND THE 'DIABOLO'

Wandering the streets with a puzzled look on my face, I cannot help but notice all the different toy stores lining the streets, most of them offering the same generic toys that can be found in any toy shop in the world; from Spiderman to Superman figurines, the only things that vary are size and colour. Barbies

would much rather put Legos together than receive a new watch or clothes.

During one of my walks through downtown La Paz I stumbled upon a toy store which seemed to do things quite differently, not because they did not sell the

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WAYRA PHAXSI

Voladores sail in the sky, like vessels of the wind, soaring on the breath of Pachamama. Flyers forge a stronger connection with la madre tierra. Kites harmonize intergenerational dissonance, bringing people of all walks of life together.

TEXT : ALEXANDRA MELEÁN



Kites at Wayra Phaxsi come in every shape and design. It's telling of our times that the day's victor was neither this lion, nor the newspaper kite below. An Angry Birds kite soared victorious at the end of the afternoon.



Volador in hand, 4-year-old Valentina prepares for her kite's maiden flight.

If age is a game of blackjack between youth and seniority, who wins? Odds are the game is fixed. Youth is dealt the upper hand, hitting 21 on the mark. Yet age tends to discriminate when it comes to games. More than a number, spiritual age is a measure of state of mind, optimism, determination and perseverance. Visiting Pipiripi on a Sunday in late August, a recreational park between the city's centre and Miraflores, it becomes clear how kite-making bridges the generational and existential gap between seniors and children. The ceremony harmonizes intergenerational dissonance, as people of all ages stand to contemplate their flying creations. On the 25th of August we were lucky enough to witness the city's first annual flying contest, *Wayra Phaxsi*, festival of the wind. ✕



Sailing high, a newspaper kite flies entranced towards Illimani.



© AMARU VILLANUEVA

Weathered and dark hands delicately fold the tail of a kite.



© AMARU VILLANUEVA

After assessing wind conditions, a grandfather and his grandson prepare to launch their kite into the air.

Helping to reduce deforestation in Bolivia, one click at a time

TEXT: IZZY SMITH



I played SimPachamama for the first time 4 hours after landing in La Paz. In my zombie-like state, I found the game strangely addictive and continued to play it in a quest to become a better virtual town mayor.

The game is not only compelling and fun, but related to the increasingly relevant debate surrounding deforestation. The goal of the game is to find the right combination of development policies that will improve the life of the town dwellers while managing to reduce deforestation. It has a similar feel to the SIMS, in which

you, the player, are in total control. On the left side of the screen, you have several game options. On the right side, are the indicators of your town's development. Smiley faces are the barometer of your townspeople's happiness.

Easy, you say? Come and try for yourself.

The notion of using a game as a vehicle for talking about deforestation is, perhaps, not entirely novel. But what makes SimPachamama interesting is its simulation of this debate in a rural context. In your role as a virtual mayor, for exam-

ple, you must decide as you play along how to invest the money you've generated through decentralized conservation taxes. This setup empowers you as a mayor to have a long term impact in your region. This setup, however, already presupposes a decentralized scheme for deforestation policy, which is not common practice in the real world.

The span of each game is a full 20 years of your town's development, which elapse during only minutes of real game time. The decisions you make as the mayor, and the policies you set in motion, will determine the growth of your town as

well as its impact on the environment. As the game unravels, you can observe the virtual consequences of your local initiatives.

The often abstract question of foreign investment is very real for you as a rural mayor. Given the debate surrounding the impact of foreign investment on sustainable rural development in Bolivia and elsewhere, there are two gameplay settings on this issue. In one setting, you can play the game with access to foreign funds for your rural town. In the other, you choose to rely solely on local taxation as a source of revenue for your mayor's office.

After playing the game a few times, the

player discover this lesson during the course of the game, illustrating the potential of SimPachamama as an awareness device to bring these issues to the forefront of global and local discussions.

As a simulation game, SimPachamama approaches the conservation debate from a pragmatic standpoint, as opposed to a fundamentalist one. This, I think, is a good thing. The problem with approaching conservation from a fundamentalist viewpoint is that it inhibits the process of making important compromises. Ardent activists for the environment often demand a comprehensive policy change at a national level as the only way to address the issue of

few weeks ago when I attended a press conference held by INESAD, a think tank instrumental in the development of SimPachamama, where I managed to grab an informal interview with its director, Dr Lykke Andersen. We discussed the inspiration of SimPachamama, as well as some of the difficulties faced during its development. According to Dr Andersen the starting point was Bolivia's rejection of the UN-led initiative REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) in 2010. Undeterred by the obstacles this presented, INESAD and its partners persevered to produce this useful and absorbing game SimPachamama.

We also touched on one key aspect missing from SimPachamama; it assumes that the bureaucracy of local government will have no effect on decentralizing conservation initiatives. We agreed that this was a significant hurdle but that there are important examples both in Bolivia and the region that can contribute to solving this aspect of the debate.

THE PROBLEM WITH APPROACHING CONSERVATION FROM A FUNDAMENTALIST VIEWPOINT IS THAT IT INHIBITS THE PROCESS OF MAKING IMPORTANT COMPROMISES

local need for external investment becomes strikingly apparent. I will admit that the first few times I played SimPachamama, I was determined to succeed without the support of foreign nations even though I was told my objective would prove almost impossible. Reality hit me rather quickly however, as I realized I could not sustain the development of my town without also making considerable investments. I was shocked by this discovery, both as a gamer and as someone who is engaged in the debate over deforestation policy. It proved impossible for me to help my town develop in the long term and reduce our rate of deforestation without the help of external funding.

This was, frankly, a slight disappointment for me at first; something akin to finding out you can't complete a game level without using cheat codes. But, afterwards, I saw the value in letting each

conservation. SimPachamama explores a different path. It is aimed at specific communities in Bolivia, where a scheme of conservation wouldn't overtly damage the local economy, instead it offers the possibility of generating income and creating jobs. As a result, you, as mayor, are challenged to design a practical, tailored strategy with a local focus.

This element is what makes SimPachamama a useful tool for exploring how to reduce deforestation without damaging the development of local communities. It is both a game and a tool to shape local policy. It's this intriguing duality that grips you from the outset.

I can't help but feel that the lessons learned from this game will face many challenges in their application. That said, I believe the spurning of REDD was beneficial insofar as it forced SimPachamama's creators to rethink their approach and customise it to tackle the unique issues of conservation in Bolivia. By adopting a more pragmatic approach, I think they have a greater chance of persuading politicians to lend their support and begin to implement genuine change. While SimPachamama is certainly not the final solution for the development vs conservation debate, it does offer a place to start. Maybe that is enough for now. ✖

My obsession with the game started a





CHOLITA FOOTBALL

THE KEY TO TRANSFORMING WOMEN'S
FOOTBALL IN BOLIVIA?

TEXT AND PHOTO: JOHN DOWNES

When contemplating football in South America, one automatically thinks about those countries steeped in World Cup tradition such as Brazil, Argentina, and even Uruguay. One would be forgiven for neglecting to appreciate the passion ingrained in countries such as Bolivia, as in the West we are caught up in the hysteria and romanticism of the upper echelons of the South American game. The salient fact is that football is in the DNA of the continent, regardless of which nation you are from. From birth, both men *and* women are caught up in the wonder of the 'beautiful game', and Bolivia is no different. However, a lack of grass roots initiatives have failed to capitalise on this female devotion to the game, not least exemplified by the most unlikely of sources: Bolivian cholitas.

Cholitas are primarily renowned for their traditional dress sense and reserved approach. With their bowler hats, multilayered skirts, ornamented shawls, and typically short stature, cholitas are instantly recognisable, yet their footballing prowess is usually kept hidden.

Indeed, when I visited an artificial football pitch near Valle de la Luna, all the cholitas whom I approached were, or had been, involved in football. Sonia Cuba, Silvia Escóbar, and Rosemary Illanes all cited enjoyment and health as the main reason why they and other cholitas play. Illanes and Escóbar both agreed that cholita football has been played for generations, as both their mothers had played.

In La Paz, cholita football is played casually on weekends in such areas as Irpavi, Ovejuyo, Chasquipampa and Villa Victoria. El Alto has more tournaments and Escóbar, who plays cholita futsal on Mother's Day in La Paz, told me that the cholitas of El Alto train and play in regular tournaments and season-long championships which are guided by rules.

The reason for this is that there is more unity and social endeavour in El Alto because of better organisation within the surrounding **pueblos** and thus have more teams to play in tournaments, as opposed to the recreational, unstructured cholita football of the big cities. In these rural communities, cholitas sensibly exploit the free open fields available to avoid the hassle of having to hire pitches to play.

Sunday is the main day for cholita foot-

ball and in the various small provinces it is not really separated from the traditional customs, it is actually one of the main activities. Depending on the competition, what the referees allow, and individual preference, cholitas wear either their traditional polleras or shorts and tracksuits. Illanes, who managed a cholita team for two years believes many cholitas play with polleras because they've become accustomed to them when practicing.

Esmeralda, a local celebrity cholita, told me, 'cholitas play just to be able to play, they see it as a distraction, as fun, but they also play in championships to win cups, so they are great – they exert themselves... cholitas are really good football players'. Occasionally, cholita football carries a philanthropic element, as the women put aside their daily activities with the sole purpose of raising money for children from the various shelters across El Alto.

Cholitas are even hired in Mayoral initiatives and those of the Directorate for the Promotion of Sport, dependent of the municipal government of El Alto, such as the Cholitas Championship in honour of Women's Day.

Esmeralda who has played since she was a child, believes that cholitas inspire their communities by playing in, and organising, their neighbourhood tournaments. She believes that the intrigue of tourists and journalists at seeing women in long dresses play has popularised Bolivian football to the rest of the world; 'suddenly the country has a football image even if the senior team is not too good'.

An avid Bolivar fan, Esmeralda became famous when she was photographed with the **barra** at Estadio Hernando Siles. Determined to break convention, her and her friend were the first cholitas to be part of the 'Furia Celeste' (hardcore fans) and it is incredibly rare to see cholitas there even now. She started getting imitated by other cholitas that went to that part of the arena but they were quickly scared away because, 'cholitas are not very sociable, they're quite shy and reserved'. She now travels with Bolivar as an official fan and plays for the club's supporter team, 'las Yayas'.

Bolivar's head coach Miguel Angel Portugal, was recently quoted as saying, 'I think football in Bolivia is a passion which has surprised me. I was surprised to see the city courts are always full of people, from small children to 'mujeres de pollera' (cholitas), playing football'. In his view, it is precisely because of the incredible passion for football in Bolivia that authorities should pay more attention to channelling all that energy into a sound structural development of the sport and thus the transformation of football as a whole.

Since Evo Morales became President, as a football fanatic he has helped small communities organise tournaments which provide prizes like cattle or even crates of beer. People therefore apply

WITH THEIR BOWLER HATS, MULTI-LAYERED SKIRTS, ORNAMENTED SHAWLS, AND TYPICALLY SHORT STATURE, CHOLITAS ARE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE, YET THEIR FOOTBALLING PROWESS IS USUALLY KEPT HIDDEN.

themselves more and have an added incentive to improve their skills. It is not as centralised, and everyone who wants to can take part. The government has been building more football pitches across the country. However, the sport is still largely underfunded and very little help is directed specifically at women. There is still a real sense that not enough is being done to garner success.

Bolivian women's football even transcends the country's borders. Anthropologist Juliane Müller, discovered that in Seville, Spain, teams of South American affiliation have been set up and seen an influx of Bolivian female immigrants flock to their ranks. Müller notices the 'fuerza gravitatoria' (gravitational pull) exerted over Bolivian players who sign for female teams formed by players from their country of origin—such as 'Real Santa Cruz' and 'Bolivia'—through the migratory chains and interpersonal networks formed in Seville. Indeed, Müller believes these female football unions to symbolically mark the desire for 'a new beginning, overcoming prejudice, and female solidarity', going on to say that the language of football in

general, and globally, is characterized by a strong metaphorical tendency.

This highlights the real desire of Bolivian women to break through traditional patriarchal chains, a sentiment fully endorsed by Rodolfo Garcia, 40, who coaches children of both genders. He told me, 'women's football has been left behind because of the lack of implementation of politics and policies from our local governments. There are no incentives for women's football'.

'It is in the hands of the leaders. I've been working with little girls for eight years, and I can assure you that I am the only teacher who still maintains the line of thought of equality of opportunity. I don't close the doors to kids, I open them. This is the only school for women's football, and there are many kids participating'.

'We need the sexist way of thinking to vanish, and start thinking in different ways. Change has come from the people that have power. The idea is first to convince the authorities to incen-

tivise football, because we have people and we also have resources. We have to break parents' traditional way of thinking, where they assign little girls to the sports or activities that they see fit'.

Garcia's uncertainty as to whether women's football as an activity will grow was equally as damning, as was his frustration that his football school was 'the only one' (in La Paz) that offers a place to play for children as young as four.

His hope is that one day, the girls he coaches will make it to the national team and that his school will give them an opportunity to access scholarships in the US or Canada, so they can consolidate a career through football. He nevertheless reiterated the need for help from the government and also institutions.

It is therefore clear that in Bolivia the renowned South American zeal for football is very much alive amongst women, but it is political and socio-cultural change which holds the key to harnessing the vigour of Bolivian Cholitas to see a real development in women's football.✕

PASANAKU:

SAVING WITH THE HEART

TEXT: MIRANDA SLADE

Pasanaku devises a game out of saving money. A group of players is formed, made up of family, friends or colleagues. Each member of the group puts in an agreed amount of money each time the group meets and after every Pasanaku one member of the group wins all the money donated. Eventually everyone wins back the total amount of money they put in; there's no risk and no losers.

Pasanaku is a classic example of *Ayni*, the traditional practice of mutual support in indigenous communities. The word Pasanaku means 'passes between us', which is indicative of the sentiment of reciprocity that underpins the game. In the Andean world, the community is the base of society, coming before individuals who from birth are embedded in a network of complex relationships. Reciprocity is therefore paramount, as it engenders mutual respect, justice and solidarity. But how far can we begin to consider economic reciprocity as not only cultural tradition but as a fundamental economic strategy?

In Pasanaku you play with those who you trust—your friends or your family. From my perspective at least, the coupling of finance and trust is crucial and, conversely, its absence deeply troubling. 5 years on from the Credit Crunch, its painful learnings still resonate in our society. Distressing photographs come to mind depicting of desperate people queuing in the cold outside their bank hoping for reassurance that their savings would be, well,

safe. The media brimmed with tales of poor souls who withdrew their life savings in sad brown envelopes, due to the fear that they would be the next to lose out. Comparisons were constantly drawn between the present and the 1929 Wall Street Crash, and as a naïve 14 year old sitting in front of the telly wearing a crudely un-funny slogan t-shirt and lacking any tangible knowledge of Economics—or even my own bank account—I was terrified that we had entered the next Great Depression. Were there to be Breadlines and Hoovervilles arriving in my leafy middle-class corner of South London? More importantly, would I ever be able to afford the UGG boots and Abercrombie Hoodies that my puerile 2008 dreams were made of? I vividly remember the media frenzy of the Credit Crunch and the fear it instilled in my parents. Still now I am confronting the lingering anxiety it left looming over my generation.

As a society we entrusted our savings to our banks and bankers, who in turn played games with our money and lost. Bankers and stockbrokers were quickly seen as reckless gamblers who had no consideration or compassion for those whose money they were playing with. So surely we could learn a lot from Pasanaku, as a financial system that values the importance of trust above all else.

And yet in England we hate to mix finance and friendship. In our culture of individualism one's financial situation is not something one speaks about. Doing so remains taboo and stigmatised. Even in marriage, some debts remain hidden and irresponsible spending is too shameful to

confess, even to a spouse. Admitting to my closest friend at University how far I have eaten (or drank, as the case may be) into my overdraft would be excruciating. However in Pasanaku, you confess your finances and accept the support of people in your social circle. Every Pasanaku player I spoke to admitted that they will readily bend the rules if a member of their group needs the money at that time. The obligation only lasts as long as the cycle, and as a microfinance strategy it is based entirely on trust—no written contracts are exchanged—and is kept completely separate from the banks or government.

La Paz is a city where traditional Andean cultures are in full synchrony and confusion with what some of us recognise as the modern world; where a stern-faced Cholita crowned by a hat balancing askew (on plaits that swing by her waist, adorned in kaleidoscopic layers of skirts), will sell you an iPhone charger. Pasanaku has thrived in La Paz, escaping its status as a cultural relic and surviving to the present day as a widespread saving strategy and social activity. The many Pasanaku groups that are played in workplaces are a vivid example. I met Eulogio Callisava, at work on the 3rd floor of a skyscraper in the centre of the metropolis. As a player of Pasanaku for the last 3 years, he confirms that it is a common activity across the city's offices.

Teresa Conesa has been playing Pasanaku for 6 years now, in a group composed of other mothers from her son's school. She sees the social dimension as the most fundamental aspect of Pasanaku. Unlike other social arrangements, Pasanaku is an obligation and a commitment and because money is involved she knows that her guests won't find an excuse not to turn up. So the players are knowingly not only investing their money but also investing in spending time with loved ones. Teresa firmly views Pasanaku as an obligation although maybe because you

do it with your friends it's fun... an obligation mixed with fun' and she eventually admits that it is definitely more fun than about the financial dimension involved. Giggling, she recalls one Pasanaku group that became an even grander occasion by playing in fancy dress.

The stereotype is that Pasanaku is a ladies' game. When I asked Teresa about this, she suggests that it is mainly women who want to have a night away from their husbands and children. She knows of some women who have a different Pasanaku every night as an escape from their family life, and their

evening in the living room of a beautiful house in Zona Sur (La Paz's Chelsea, notorious for a distinct accent, preppy teenagers, and a prevailing Western influence on consumption and aesthetics). A log fire glows

highlights for the privilege of speaking in hushed tones about some inscrutable scandal. For these women the social dimension of Pasanaku is its allure.

My initial scepticism couldn't quite swallow that this game could be so successful when only based on trust. What about humanity's collective and uncompromising fundamental selfishness? Surely, over the past centuries this ancestral

system has been exploited by the occasional flake or usurper. My probing questions on this point are met with blank stares, or nervous laughter. Hazy stories are recalled of a friend who had heard of someone who had left the country with all the group's money. It is agreed that it can be awkward when people owe each other money. Some anecdotes involve people forgetting their hosting duties and thus betraying the code of reciprocity, serving biscuits and crisps found in an uninspiring last-minute supermarket dash.

Despite my best efforts to undermine the ancient Andean wisdom, I didn't manage to do so. There is a lesson to be taken from this ancestral game. Perhaps just the sentiment that Teresa pointed out, when she emphasised how important it is that you trust the people you play with and that you have fun, 'otherwise it is a waste of time and money'. Perhaps if we make sure we play with people we love and trust, and ensure we are doing so for fun, then we can all be victors in the games we play. ✕

THE WOMEN THEMSELVES ARE AS IMMACULATE AS THE LOUNGE THEY ARE SET IN. THEIR HAIR IS NEATLY COIFFED; NAILS IMPECCABLY MANICURED AND IN AN ACT OF ADAMANTINE FEMALE SOLIDARITY THEY PARADE IN STILETTO HEELS, UNDETERRED BY ZONA SUR'S TUMULTUOUS PAVEMENTS

husbands can't argue with it because it's a serious financial commitment. Telma Cuentas believes it is more popular amongst women maybe because women are more concerned about saving money than men are. Telma's perspective is certainly in line with theories which state that the hyper-masculine culture of banking and finance being partly to blame for the financial crash. The same theories that recently prompted the British Member of Parliament Tessa Jowell to proclaim, on live television and rather spontaneously, that had more women been in charge of big banks, then the financial crisis would never have happened. The game I observed was pointedly women only. As if he were an endangered and elusive species, I only caught a glimpse of the husband arriving at home. He himself only managed to drop off his briefcase before disappearing upstairs—without dinner—and we returned to no man's land.

A pasanaku group I spoke to meets once a month. I was able to join them one

in the corner while the ladies are buoyed up upon a powder-blue sofa set. The women themselves are as immaculate as the lounge they are set in. Their hair is neatly coiffed; nails impeccably manicured and in an act of adamant female solidarity they parade in stiletto heels, undeterred by Zona Sur's tumultuous pavements. Immediately, they admit that the game is mainly an excuse to gossip, 'That's it!' one woman howls. And she's proven right; over the course of the evening the amount of money that 'passes between' the women pales in comparison to the expanse of gossip that flies from their lips. They talk about children; theirs, other people's—who's married, who's put on weight and who will 'only be cute, but never handsome'. Over a lavishly arranged dinner, when someone begins to lament the onslaught of ageing they shriek with laughter about Botox becoming an appropriate and well-deserved trophy for a lady approaching 50. While the others are distracted, one woman is singled out by a head of golden





**SOPHIA VAHDATI VISITS SAN PEDRO PRISON TO LEARN THAT
THE GAMES OF LIFE PLAYED BY INMATES ARE NOT ALL THAT
DIFFERENT TO THOSE PLAYED ON THE OUTSIDE**



DO NOT PASS GO

DO NOT COLLECT TWO
HUNDRED BOLIVIANOS

Describing all this now makes it sound like a game of Monopoly. And for people who had money, it almost was. ... But in reality it wasn't a game; this was real money, and real people's lives at stake.

—Thomas McFadden, *Marching Powder*

On the southern side of the tranquil Plaza San Pedro, a couple of blocks from La Paz's central artery, and a stone's throw from the Sopocachi district, lies a huge concrete construction awash with uneven off-white paint. Sitting in this sunny square, I look around and see kiosks and market stalls, cholitas selling nuts and chocolates as children and adults lounge around in the sun; if it were not for a small red brick watchtower on the corner of the building and a scrum of police officers, the building would simply blend into the background of the square. But if you venture inside this brick fortress, you will find high-profile disgraced politicians, alleged terrorists, murderers, and minor thieves. This is the notorious San Pedro prison, made internationally famous by Rusty Young's book, *Marching Powder*, about prison tour guide and drug trafficker Thomas McFadden's time as an inmate. Inside, wives and children live with their convicted husbands and fathers. Behind the hype and the horror stories lie tight-knit communities and strong friendships in which a real-life game of Monopoly is part of the inmates' everyday lives.

CHANCE

Getting into San Pedro as a tourist and a journalist is not an easy process. The days of guide-led tours for travellers looking for a cheap fix inside the prison are long gone. I sit on a small wooden bench clutching my permission slip and passport, watching the long line of visitors, mainly colourful smiling cholitas and young wives with babies strapped on their fronts, being searched. They carry bags of fruit, pasta and even planks of wood. All visitors are searched as soon as they walk through one of the doors past the front entrance; women through the left and men through the right. The entrance hall is intimidating. Men clutch the bars and shout, '¿A quien llamo?', '¿Qué nombre es?' These are the **taxistas** who make a living from calling for, and finding the inmate a particular visitor is looking for. As I enter with Amaru, the director of *Bolivian Express*, voices surge up and animated faces turn towards me. A man holds up a wooden board on which small wire motorbike sculptures are fashioned to

decorate lighters—he has more sculptures than he does teeth. Around the courtyard are men selling cakes, chocolates, and beautifully sculpted wooden boats and friendship bracelets.

We ask one of the taxis to call for Castillo in Sección Pinos. Two minutes later, the man we are looking for, Luis Castillo, arrives. Dressed in a light blue Club Bolívar football shirt, tracksuit bottoms and trainers, Castillo doesn't stand out from the group that crowds the entrance hall. His smile reaches all the way to his eyes and he doesn't seem surprised to see us, despite the fact that we haven't yet met nor made prior contact. Castillo leads us across the courtyard and through to the Pi-

the amicable men continue to chat and answer questions, and I think how similar the needs of the prisoners here are to the needs of every human being. Simply depriving someone of their freedom does not remove their humanity.

COMMUNITY CHEST

Football is taken very seriously inside the prison. There are four tournaments held each year, and each section has three teams: an 'honours' team with the finest players, a 'special' team composed of regular players, and a veteran team (mutuales) for those who are older than 38. 'The aim is for everyone to be able to play', explains Castillo, who is now a

have been undertaken reduce an inmate's sentence by one day. These get out of jail cards are not so much free or organised by the penitentiary system; they are signed and sent off for approval by the delegates of each section. Jorge explains how the close-knit nature of each community breeds personal responsibility and its own form of justice. 'Everyone knows everyone else and their families. We are all friends here.' He says that the delegates' and the public's opinion of an inmate can be as important as the ruling of a judge with regards to early releases.

THE BANKER

With the property cards that are given to an inmate once he purchases a cell—which can be mortgaged when an inmate falls upon hard times—this game of Monopoly is little different from the board game, or the game of life that we are all playing where money is power. The phrase 'money is everything' keeps emerging from everyone's lips, from the Italian anthropologist Francesca Cerbini, who authored a study of San Pedro prison called *La Casa de Jabón*, to the prison psychologist, Magali Quispe Yujia, and even the delegate of the Pinos section, Jorge.

Money is needed for everything: to advance your trial, to buy equipment to further your profession, as well as to pay for your living expenses, from accommodation to food. To me, the prison seems like a collection of small societies. Jorge's explanation of the internal rules, maintenance and management appears to be a working example of anarchism. The prison does not need a centralised control system because the prisoners fulfil that role themselves.

As we leave, we hug Luis and Jorge, promising to visit them soon and to hopefully watch a football match in action. On the way out, Amaru comments on Luis's Club Bolívar T-shirt. Luis shrugs and admits that he's actually a fan of The Strongest, La Paz's other big league team. 'I'm only wearing it because someone gave it to me', he explains. We pass a child dressed in school uniform on the stairs and another toddler playing around on a toy bike as we return to the entrance hall. All my initial fear has vanished. In fact, I've felt more endangered in some nightclubs in London. The unease and fear comes from us, the people from the outside. The vast majority of the prisoners in San Pedro are simply trying to play at living, just like the rest of us. ✕

JORGE EXPLAINS HOW THE CLOSE-KNIT NATURE OF EACH COMMUNITY BREEDS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS OWN FORM OF JUSTICE

nos section of the prison. The prison is made up of eight sectors, of which Pinos is one of the more expensive and selective areas. It is clean and nicely decorated, with several cafés and **salteña** vendors. As we walk up the stairs and into the Pinos delegate's office, I'm immediately put at ease by the green-and-white linoleum flooring, the Coca-Cola-emblemed chairs, the TV showing a Jason Statham film, a half-eaten tub of ice cream, and two pictures of the Virgin Mary on either side of the room.

YOU HAVE ROLLED THREE DOUBLES; GO DIRECTLY TO JAIL

As a pastime, many of the prisoners in San Pedro play games of chance such as **loba** and **cacho**. The stakes are small and rarely surpass five bolivianos a bet. The **delegado** of sección Pinos, Jorge, describes the afternoons spent playing cards as a form of therapy, of social interaction as opposed to a penchant for gambling. The social and therapeutic dynamics of the game playing, whether it be card, billiards or football, is of the highest importance. Jorge crosses his arms over his US-highschool-style sports jacket, looks me straight in the eyes and explains how it is the director of each section's job to keep his community entertained and occupied; this is the way conflict and unrest are avoided. He says that the people here are not bad, they simply need entertainment and ways of amusing themselves. The line between prisoner and free citizen blurs inside my head as

member of the Pinos veteran team.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl consulted psychiatrists in prisoner-of-war camps, who said that 'only those who were oriented toward the future, toward a goal in the future, toward a meaning to fulfil in the future, were likely to survive'. The idea of sport and game-playing as a form of therapy is visible everywhere you look in San Pedro prison. It is an important part of these men's lives, and the responsibility and organisation that is left up to them allows them thrive and have a more fulfilling existence in the prison.

It's a controlled state of anarchy in the prison. From the pitch rental for football practice (five to seven bolivianos an hour) to the purchase uniforms for the first team, social activity breeds companionship and personal improvement. Castillo recounts how he has seen many good players leave the prison with more passion and skill about their game than when they entered. Star players are even transferred between teams, although this means that an inmate has to sell his cell (everything, including housing, is for sale in San Pedro) and move to another section.

GET OUT OF JAIL FREE CARD

The games of San Pedro are not without their own bargains and deals. Certificates that state that two days of work or study



PINK FLOYD SINFÓNICO

TEXT: JESSY SARTH
PHOTOS: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

I sit here writing this review with *Dark Side of the Moon* pounding through my headphones, inspired by the performance last night. Last night's show can only be described as incredible; bursting with passion, flare, and underlined with excellent musical control. 'Pink Floyd Sinfónico' was performed on stage at the home of Bolivia's National Symphonic Orchestra in La Paz, the Centro Sinfónico. The dramatic setting was accentuated by meticulous lighting, creating an almost baroque atmosphere. This contrast between old and new was the key to the success of the evening as a whole; the contemporary songs and images of Pink Floyd being performed by a classically-trained symphonic orchestra

resulted in an unexpected richness. This richness extended beyond the sound of the music into the imagery and soul of the evening.

Before the evening even started it was

THE WHOLE OF THE FIRST HALF WAS INCREDIBLY ATMOSPHERIC WITH ROUSING HIGHS AND GENTLE LOWS IN THE MUSIC COMBINING PERFECTLY TO LEAVE ME IN AN ALMOST CONSTANT STATE OF GOOSEBUMPS

clear to me that this was *THE* place to be on this Thursday evening in La Paz; whether you look at the Facebook group showing scores of people lamenting the fact they couldn't get tickets, or the fact the performance had been extended by 4 nights already. For those who did have

tickets there was an anxious tension in the air, with people arriving early and queuing outside to ensure their successful entrance. I wasn't sure what to expect. I had listened to the recordings of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) playing Pink Floyd, but I had no experience of a live performance such as this. The director Flavio Machicado kindly agreed to an interview before the show. I asked him about any similarities between these performances and any other classical productions of Pink Floyd.

He explained that this production was completely original, and came from the imagination of its creator Alexis Trepp who commissioned the production of the scores (including over a dozen original arrangements), and thus prevented it being contaminated by outside influences.

His musical style and interpretation can be clearly seen across the production, making it a completely unique piece of work.

Having gone back and re-listened to the Royal Philharmonic recording, I feel that while there are some similarities, the differences between the two are more profound. Firstly, the RPO does sound more like a musical accompaniment, with the vocals taking very much a back seat in most songs but the quality of the playing and the use of string section in place of some of the guitar solos is exquisite. In comparison, the Bolivian performance of Pink Floyd songs was much more 'in your face', a true spectacle of lights along with Floyd's signature circular projection of video imagery. Furthermore, the vocalists were the key to the success of many of the songs, bringing together the band and the orchestra in one harmonious sound. Trepp's production showed a greater variety in its arrangements, and his influence and exuberance is evident almost everywhere, helping really bring the show to life.

I watched the first half of the show from the ground-level seating, where you could

was incredibly atmospheric with rousing highs and gentle lows in the music com-

for the audience before the big finale, and as much as I love the huge sound of Pink Flo-



binning perfectly to leave me in an almost constant state of goosebumps.

For the second half we moved to the mezzanine level and had a great view overlooking the whole orchestra in its

yd and their anthems there was something infectious about this performance of 'Wish you Were Here' which I will remember every time it comes on.

It is clear that this production is in large part a reflection of Trepp's dream, yet it took many people to put it together, organise, and pull off with such success. Machicado mentioned that there were a number of businesses that believed in the project 'before listening to a single rift' because they believed in the reputation of the Symphonic Orchestra. Thus, this incredible feat was a success due in a large part to the force of nature that is Alexis Trepp, as well as the orchestra and its supporters.

So what does this mean for the future? Well in the immediate future the National Symphonic Orchestra will return to performing the classics, but there are always challenges to take on, which have the potential of expanding the audience beyond the usual classical-music goers. Machicado hinted at one such possible production, which involves trying to rescue music from the 19th Century and the historic wars of Bolivia's painful past. Whatever comes next, it's clear the orchestra have set a high bar for themselves. To retain their standard and success with a range of audiences, they will have to continue to prove that classical, modern and traditional music can be bridged in innovative ways in Bolivia.✕



see everything from the concentration lines of the musicians to the flourishes of Trepp's fluorescent drumsticks. This half consisted of a tribute to 'Dark Side of the Moon' played in order, but reworked with the orchestra. The whole of the first half

glory. This half consisted of a number of other Pink Floyd hits, and contained my favourite song of the night. 'Wish you were here' was hauntingly beautiful and accented perfectly with the harmonies from the female vocalists. It was a final slow down



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SPANISH

BARRA

A bar, or, in the case of football, the fans

CACHO

Dice game popular in Bolivian bars

DIRIGENTE

Political leader

DELEGADO

Elected inmate authorities in San Pedro prison, one for each section.

POLLERA

The overskirt usually worn by cholitas

PUEBLO

Catch-all term that can mean people, nation, town, village, or neighborhood

SALTEÑA

A type of savory pastry found in Bolivia, filled with meat, vegetables, and gravy.

TAXISTA

Taxi driver, or in the prison, the person who calls inmates when they have visitors

AVIONCITO

A colloquial name for hopscotch meaning 'little aeroplane' in Spanish

PIEDRITA

Diminutive term denoting a small stone or pebble

GOMA EVA

EVA foam, a soft and flexible with a variety of applications: from toys to mousepads

LOBA

Popular local card game, variant of whist

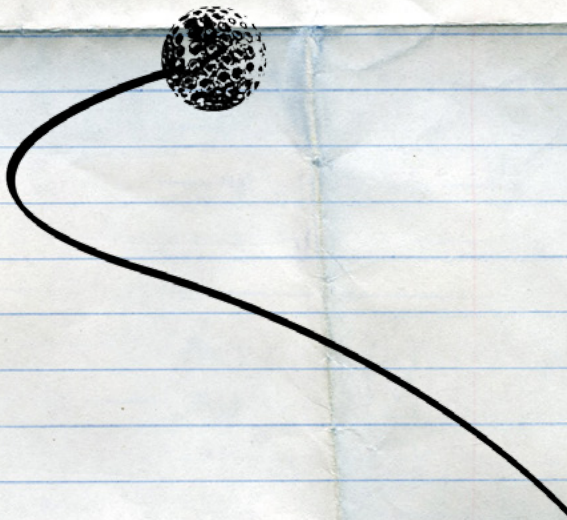


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